# WORDS MATTER!

**Language Statement & Reference Guide**

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## INPUD & ANPUD Language Statement & Reference Guide

### Who is INPUD?

The International Network of People Who Use Drugs (INPUD) is a global, peer-based network that seeks to promote the health and protect the rights and dignity of people who use/have used drugs. (For more information about INPUD see: www.inpud.net)

### Who is ANPUD?

The Asian Network of People who use Drugs (ANPUD) is a regional community-led organisation for community empowerment, human rights, and people-centered evidence- & rights-based drug laws and policies. (For more information about ANPUD see: www.anpud.org)

### WHAT'S THE AIM OF THIS STATEMENT & GUIDE?

**Language does not stand still.** It is dynamic, and the language and words we use are always changing. This makes it difficult to be absolute in the way we use language. Nevertheless, there are times when certain language and words used in relation to people who use drugs can be disempowering, divisive, confusing, or give offence.

This guide aims to explain INPUD's current position on the use of language and to provide clear advice on what is acceptable to us as communities of people who use drugs. We want to encourage all people to be thoughtful about the language and words they use, and have therefore provided a reference guide that identifies stigmatising language and gives non-judgemental, strengths-based, and respectful alternatives.

Due to criminalisation, people who use drugs experience high degrees of stigma and discrimination from family, friends, and broader society. Stigma breaks down trust, prevents communication, and leads to shame and marginalisation. While research shows that the type and extent of stigma varies according to the drug(s) being used,[2] other research has confirmed stigma is so pervasive in relation to drug use that it is an almost universal experience for people who use drugs.[3]

The role of mainstream media in promoting and perpetuating negative stereotypes, vilifying language, and sensationalist ideas in relation to people who use drugs is well acknowledged.[4] In recent years, INPUD and its regional members have conducted advocacy campaigns to draw attention to specific cases. While this and other advocacy work has resulted in some positive developments such as published retractions, updating of style guides and codes of practice, the media continues to drive negative public perceptions of people who use drugs in large part due to the use of stigmatising language.[5]

2. Brown, S. A. (2015). Stigma towards marijuana users and heroin Users. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 47(3), 213-220.
3. Room, R. (2005). Stigma, social inequality and alcohol and drug use. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 24(2), 143-155.
4. Global Commission on Drug Policy. 2017. The World Drug Perception Problem: Countering Prejudices About People Who Use Drugs – Report. *Media & Public Perception* pp.26-30. *https://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/GCDP-Report-2017_Perceptions-ENGLISH.pdf*
5. Blog post: "Media Needs More Than a New Style Guide to Get Them to Stop Stigmatizing People Who Use Drugs". 18 July 2017. Drug Policy Alliance: *https://www.drugpolicy.org/blog/media-needs-more-new-style-guide-get-them-stop-stigmatizing-people-who-use-drugs*

Slang and idioms associated with the social and cultural aspects of illicit drug use play an important role in everyday lives of people who use drugs. Everyone should assess the use of such language for themselves in the context of their circumstances and relationships. If you are unsure, consult with people who use drugs around you and value their opinion and their expertise. People who use drugs have the moral authority to redeploy the symbols of their oppression and to use terms like "junkie" as a form of empowerment, when referring to themselves and their communities. One of the problems with stigma is that over time, people can accept and internalise the negative views they hear so often – which is referred to as 'self-stigma'. By always making positive language choices, you will automatically support people who use drugs to view themselves and their communities in the best possible light.

**Acknowledgments:**
This statement & guide has been developed by the International Network of People Who Use Drugs (INPUD) and the Asian Network of People who use Drugs (ANPUD) in consultation with other regional networks, It also builds on earlier INPUD advocacy statements and position papers addressing issues related to human rights, stigma, language, and terminology.[9,10,11,12] We also wish to acknowledge several other language guides and articles that have been used as reference materials in the development of this resource.[13,14,15]

9 INPUD and Youth Rise, 2013, The Harms of Drug Use: Criminalisation, Misinformation, and Stigma (London: INPUD and Youth Rise), available at *http://www.inpud.net/The_Harms_of_Drug_Use_JayLevy2014_INPUD_YouthRISE.pdf*

10 INPUD, 2015, Drug User Peace Initiative: Stigmatising People who Use Drugs (London: INPUD), available at *http://www.druguserpeaceinitiative.org/dupidocuments/DUPI-Stigmatising_People_who_Use_Drugs.pdf*

11 INPUD 2015, Consensus Statement on Drug Use Under Prohibition: Human Rights, Health, and the Law (London: INPUD), available at *https://www.inpud.net/consensus_statement_2015.pdf*

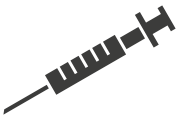
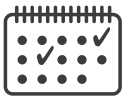
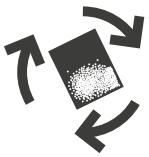
12 INPUD (International Network of People who Use Drugs), 2011, INPUD Position Statement on Language, Identity, Inclusivity and Discrimination, available at *http://www.inpud.net/INPUD_Statement_Position_Paper_on_Language_Identity_Inclusivity_Discrimination_Nov2011.pdf*

13 NUAA & NADA Guide – Language Matters: *https://www.nuaa.org.au/language-matters*

14 Language: Abandoning Addiction Blog file: *https://pointsadhs.com/2018/08/28/language-abandoning-addiction/*

15 How Stigmatising Language Effects people in Australia Who Use Tobacco, Alcohol & Other Drugs: *https://www1.racgp.org.au/ajgp/2020/march/how-stigmatising-language-affects-people-in-austra*

## LANGUAGE REFERENCE GUIDE

| | WHAT TO SAY | WHAT NOT TO SAY |
|---|---|---|
| | **People/person who use/s drugs** | Drug user; drug abuser; druggo; druggies; drug fiend; acronyms (PWUD, etc.) |
|  | **People/person who inject drugs** | Injector; junkie; smack-head; injecting drug user; meth-head; acronyms (PWID, IDU, etc.) |
| | **People/person who smoke drugs** | Pothead; chuffer; meth-head |
|  | **People/person who use/s drugs occasionally or opportunistically** | Recreational drug user |
| | **People/person with drug dependence** | Addict; drug addict; drug abuser; problem[atic] drug user; misuser; substance abuser*; person who is addicted |
|  | **Drug dependence** | Addiction; drug addiction; substance abuse; substance use disorder† |

| | WHAT TO SAY | WHAT NOT TO SAY |
|---|---|---|
| | **Client/s; service user/s** | Patient |
| | **Currently using drugs** | Relapse; non-abstinent; fallen off the wagon; using again; had a setback; lost cause |
| | **People/person who has used drugs** | Clean; sober; drug-free; ex user; in recovery; maintaining recovery; ex-alcoholic |
| | **Positive/negative drug screen; Presence/absence of drug metabolite in screening process** | Clean/dirty urine/blood |
| | **Communities (of people who use drugs); Networks (of people who use drugs); Peer-led networks** | Drug using population[s]; affected communities; vulnerable populations |
| | **Opioid Treatment Program; Opioid Agonist Treatment** | Opioid Substitution Treatment; Opioid Replacement Therapy |

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The International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD) is a global peer-based organisation that seeks to promote the health and defend the rights of people who use drugs. INPUD will expose and challenge stigma, discrimination, and the criminalisation of people who use drugs, and its impact on the drug-using community's health and rights. INPUD will achieve this through processes of empowerment and advocacy at the international level, while supporting empowerment and advocacy at community, national and regional levels. www.inpud.net

INPUD is part of Bridging the Gaps – health and rights for key populations. This unique programme addresses the common challenges faced by sex workers, people who use drugs and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in terms of human rights violations and accessing much needed HIV and health services. Go to www.hivgaps.org for more information.

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ANPUD

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